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The Role of Education in Development in an Indigenous Mexican Community: Indigenous Perspectives

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Development Studies at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

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2001
This research project was carried out with a scholarship awarded by the Mexican Government through the Secretariat of External Relations. Funding was also received from the Development Cooperation Division of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the role of formal education in development for indigenous peoples. To shed light on the complex relationship between education and development, it presents an in-depth exploration of the experiences, concerns and aspirations of members of one indigenous Mexican community concerning the issues of identity, development and schooling. It investigates how the people of this location, a Zapoteco village in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca, see development for their community, and how formal education could best contribute to the achievement of these aspirations. Education is considered within the context of different social processes taking place in the community.

Attention is focused on the perspectives of indigenous parents and young people, in accordance with a view of development which recognises the expertise of local people in analysing their situation, and respects their opinions and ideas as paramount to achieving appropriate development. Data from interviews with community members is analysed to reveal a number of themes running through respondents' opinions on culture, identity and development, and the interaction of formal education with these. Their ideas concerning education and cultural autonomy are considered in the light of educational and cultural theories sustained by research, and an analysis of the potential of formal education to contribute to the achievement of expressed development goals is presented.

Development for most Tabaenños consisted on the one hand of cultural continuity, in terms of traditional livelihoods, forms of social organisation and language, and on the other of the acquisition of skills, knowledge and institutions that will allow for the economic, social and cultural development of the community and its individuals. Research and the experiences of indigenous communities elsewhere in the world suggest that education has the potential to support community development in both of these aspects. Tabaenños are beginning to take a more active role in formal education, and the existence of a solid and autochthonous foundation for participation and locally controlled development in the community offers grounds for cautious optimism regarding its ability to continue to define and achieve both the education and the development talked of by community members.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr. Barbara Nowak of Massey University and Dr. Rodolfo Stavenhagen of El Colegio de México for their input, support and patience. Thanks are also due to Bridget Mosley, Vesper Mosley, Jodie Malone, Helen Jenkins and Chloe Randall for reading drafts and making valuable comments and suggestions.

Innumerable thanks are due to my sister Bridget for her constant support and pressure throughout the writing period, and for dealing with necessities in New Zealand during my stays in Mexico. Without her I would have neither started nor finished. I am grateful also to family and friends who offered moral support and respected the priority academic work took in my time and energy. Thanks to Germán Figueroa for his emotional and technical support.

Financial assistance from a number of institutions and foundations made my stay in Mexico to carry out research possible: primarily, the Mexican Secretariat of External Affairs, and also the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the New Zealand Federation of University Women, Massey University and the Graduate Research Fund of that university.

The cooperation and assistance of Arturo Ruiz of the Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca in locating a fieldwork site was much appreciated. Thanks are also due to Maximino Cerqueda García of the Oaxacan Indigenous Education Department and to Ambrosio Florentino Alcántara and Ramón Jiménez Agustín for allowing me to conduct research in the primary school of San Juan Tabaá.

Finally, but most importantly, I would like to express my profound gratitude to the director and teachers of the Cuauhtemoc Bilingual Primary School and to the municipal authorities and people of San Juan Tabaá, for welcoming me into their community and for their time, cooperation and goodwill, without which this document would not exist.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANPIBAC  Alianza Nacional de Profesionales Indígenas Bilingües
National Alliance of Bilingual Indigenous Professionals
CBTa  Centro de Bachillerato para Técnicas Agropecuarias
Agricultural Technical High School
CNPI  Consejo Nacional de Pueblos Indígenas
National Council of Indigenous Peoples
DEI  Departamento de Educación Indígena
Department of Indigenous Education (in the state of Oaxaca)
DGEI  Dirección General de Educación Indígena
General Directorate of Indigenous Education
EZLN  Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional
Zapatista National Liberation Army
IEEPO  Instituto Estatal de Educación Pública de Oaxaca
Oaxaca State Institute of Public Education
ILO  International Labour Organisation
INI  Instituto Nacional Indigenista
National Indigenist Institute
L1  home language or first language
L2  second language
RLS  reversing language shift
SEP  Secretaría de Educación Pública
Secretariat of Public Education
SJT  San Juan Tabaá
GLOSSARY

aguardiente a locally brewed alcoholic spirit, made from sugar cane
alcalde the person responsible for justice and dispute resolution
bachillerato a high school, usually one that offers a technical course of studies
barrio neighbourhood, a group of families in the village who hold land communally
cabeza municipal municipal capital
cacique a local despot, a person who holds political power in a community and abuses it to further his own interests, usually a large land-owner who rents plots to peasant farmers (usually historical)
cargo an office or position of great responsibility in the community, generally elected by popular vote, e.g. president, sindico, alcalde, president of the church
ciudadano literally "citizen," used in Tabaa to refer to those who take part in the community administrative system of assemblies and services, i.e. men between 17 and 60 who are not students
fiesta a religious festival
gozona see guelaguetza
guelaguetza a loosely reciprocal system of mutual help among households, used when extra labour or resources are needed, e.g. weddings, harvest
indigena indigenous, an indigenous person
indio "Indian," term used to describe indigenous Mexicans in previous centuries, now considered derogatory
jarabe a traditional dance in the Sierra Norte, danced in couples to brass band music
mestizo of mixed Indian and European blood; the majority of the Mexican population belongs to this group
municipio municipality, similar to a county
Oaxaqueño/a a person from the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca
**preparatoria**
a high school that offers a course preparing students for entry into university

**servicio**
an unpaid and often obligatory position of responsibility in the community, usually appointed by the municipal authority, e.g. committee member, village security

**sierra**
mountain range

**Sierra Norte**
one of the seven regions into which the state of Oaxaca is divided, and the location of the community studied

**síndico**
the person responsible for attending to internal community affairs

**Tabaeño/a**
a person from Tabáá; the adjectival form of Tabáá, e.g. Tabaeño culture

**tequío**
obligatory and unpaid communal work on community projects, performed by *ciudadanos* and some women whenever required by the village authorities

**usos y costumbres**
"practices and customs," traditional forms of political and social organisation, now legally recognised

**Zapoteco**
one of 62 indigenous ethnic groups in Mexico, and that to which members of the community studied belong; the language family of this ethnic group